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ABSTRACT

A three-part method of teacher supervision is based on a developmental approach to early education. The method assumes that children learn by interacting with their environment and respond to the educational environment differently, according to their individual backgrounds, temperaments, and learning styles. An observational record, written by a supervisor during a classroom visit, is the first part of the method. The record focuses on child behavior within the context of a lesson or activity and is written as nearly as possible without interpretation or evaluation. The observational record is used in the second part of the method, a conference during which the observational record is co-analyzed by the supervisor and teacher. Excerpts from the record are selected by the supervisor and are studied, and suggestions evolve naturally out of the discussion. The third part is a conference summary resulting from the co-analysis of the observational record. The summary is written by the supervisor to document the insights gained from the conference and to help in planning future meetings. The method should develop the teacher's awareness for growth potential through the teaching process. It can also strengthen reciprocal accountability between the teacher and supervisor. Abbreviated samples of forms used in the method are appended. (FG)

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Annette Axtmann

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WHO SAID WHAT, DID WHAT, WHERE AND WHY?

Report of an interactional method designed for reciprocal accountability between supervisor and teacher

Annette Axtmann*

"I wonder if I was, really, of help to that teacher?" dogs the footsteps of a supervisor after conferring with a teacher. The method reported here is one attempt to help ease this feeling on the part of supervisors. I would guess it is common. The method is interdisciplinary. It has evolved out of my work as a teacher and director of preschool facilities, supervisor of student teachers in early education, readings in anthropology, linquistics, education, psychology and research into the context of child behavior (Axtmann, 1975).

This report includes major assumptions and aspects of the method with rationale. Teacher, children and supervisor are referred to as the three major participants in the method. However, I believe, it can be applied to situations other than the traditional classroom. Day care directors might use it with caregivers or social workers might use it with family day care providers. Abbreviated forms for those readers who may wish to adapt and,perhaps, assess the method in these and other situations are appendixed to this report.

Assumptions

The method is based in a developmental approach to early education and a qualitiative approach to evaluation, Descriptions of these can be found in Provence et al (1975)

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and Meisels (1979). So based, the method assumes that children learn by interacting with their environment and that they interact differently according to their individual backgrounds, temperaments and learning styles. It, also, assumes that teachers and supervisors as well as children learn and grow in working with one another. Comfortable human relationships are of central importance and are recognized as contributing to an atmosphere of cooperation. As argued by White (1959) such an atmosphere is apt to promote competence in the learner. To emphasize, learner, here, means supervisor, children and teacher.

These assumptions underly the three parts of the method: (1) an observational record; (2) a conference focused on co-analysis of the observational record; (3) a conference summary.

Observational record

The observational record is written by the supervisor during an on-site visit to the teacher's classroom. Two characteristics of this record are important. First, its focus and, second, the way it is written.

The record focuses on child behavior within the context of a particular lesson or activity. Teacher behavior is one piece of this context along with materials, content, spacial arrangement of the room, time of day, the teacher's plans. A focus on child rather than teacher behavior accents the primary importance of the children in the situation. It can, also, remind the teacher and supervisor of their mutual delight and concern for the children. It is apt to take the spotlight off the teacher as under

"critical evaluation", an everyday description of supervision (Webster, 1966) connoting discomfort. Altogether, a focus on child behavior is apt to equalize, ease and facilitate the working relationship between teacher and supervisor.

The second characteristic of the observational record is that the supervisor tries to write it without interpretation or evaluation. Here, the method imposes a rule expressed by the anthropologist, Levi Strauss (1963):

"On the observational level, the main - one could say the only-rule is that all the facts would be carefully observed and described without allowing any theoretical presconceptions to decide whether some are more important than others." (p. 272.

Applied here, Levi-Strauss's term, "theoretical preconceptions" would refer to the supervisor's expectations as to how the teacher and children might, or should, interact. It could, also, refer to judgements as to the educational value of the lesson or activity made by the supervisor during the observation. Of course, one cannot ever totally withold interpretation or, even, evaluation. The information will be inevitably constrained by what the supervisor did and did not see and, or, write down. As stated by Bloom (1974) in commenting on descriptive material used to study the development of language:

"Any description of behavior will necessarily be constrained by the process of observation, and the question for evidence accountability then becomes a matter of the degree of such constraint". (p. 84).

However, Levi-Strauss' rule is apt to help the supervisor write a description which is concrete, accurate and as accountable as possible.

Conference focused on co-analysis of the observation record

Co-analysis of the record takes place during a conference between supervisor and teacher scheduled as soon as possible after the observation. They read excerpts selected from the record by the supervisor. Then, they identify and discuss relationships between an individual child's behavior, group or teacher behavior and aspects of the situation. This process can begin with a comment or question from either participant. Through out they refer back to the record, i.e. who said what, did what, where and why. Implications as to the educational value of the lesson and suggestions for future work with the children evolve naturally out of the discussion.

Conference summary

A summary of the co-analysis with other aspects of the conference is written by the supervisor. A copy of this is given to the teacher as soon as possible after the conference. This summary documents insights and suggestions arrived at during the conference and provides both teacher and supervisor further opportunity for reflection on them. It can help both individuals plan for their next meeting.

A brief illustration drawn from my work with a student teacher as recorded on a VISIT RECORD FORM (see appendix) may serve to clarify the process:

TEACHER: Jane DATE: 3/20/80 PLACE: Brown Elementary School

LEARNING SITUATION #1: 24 3rd. graders are playing a rock identification game under the direction of their teacher, Jane. The game follows a 'bingo' pattern. The children are seated at their desks which are arranged in a loose half circle. Each has a self made 'bingo' rock card on his or her desk. Jane faces them, standing in the open end of the circle of desks. A box with rock specimens is on the table.

EXCERPT: Child #1: "What's cleavage?"

Jane: "Did that in other group" as she picks up another rock and proceeds with the game.

Children begin to move about as if restless. They talk among themselves.

CO-ANALYSIS (partial): Comment by S: The room arrangement was helpful. Everyone could see and hear you as well as one another. That was an interesting term, cleavage. What does it mean?"

Jane: "A consistent break through out the rock".

Question: "Why did you answer, "Did that in other group"?"

Jane: "Always asking questions..."

Further discussion led into child #1's individual needs. Then, a possible relationship between Jane's abrupt negation of his question and the subsequent restless behavior of the other children. Finally, we discussed the importance of new information in stimulating and maintaining attention to the lesson.

One can see that evaluation of the teaching situation was based on what did, indeed, happen during a time when we were both present. The record drew my attention to Jane's skillful use of classroom space. I was able to comment favorably, reinforce her skill and discount the spatial arrangement as having other than positive influence on the childrens ability to attend to the lesson. Thus, her comment to child #1 was thrown into relief as, perhaps, a useful interaction for discussion. One can assume that our reference to the non-evaluative record with actual words, concrete behavior and contextual details encouraged Jane to give

her own interpretation or rationale for the interaction. Her rationale, "Always asking questions..." opened up discussion of child #1's individual needs and, later, the possible effect of her response on the class as a whole. Co-analysis of this and excerpts from other learning situations seemed to help Jane become more aware of herself as a model and the childrens individual needs while working with them. Evidence for this is found in an excerpt taken from a VISIT RECORD made about one month later, 4/16/80:

LEARNING SITUATION #1: 8 children and Jane are settling themselves around a small table. Each has a copy of their reading text (Laidlaw Reading Program Level 10, Thundering Giants, Laidlaw Reading Program Bros., Co., Inc., 1976, Doubleday. River Forest, Illinois.)

EXCERPT: A boy approaches the group, hovers over Jane, drags a chair to the table and sits down. Jane: "Where is your book?"

Boy: "Haven't..."

Jane: "Go to your desk and read it. I will talk with you later." Her tone is clear and non-judgemental.

Boy leaves group. A minute later he is back: "Can't find book..." 8 children watch and listen to this exchange.

Another boy: "It's over there". Tone of voice is matter of fact, i.e. clear and non-judgemental.

Boy #1 leaves group, finds book, sits down at his desk where he bends over book and appears to concentrate on its contents in a relaxed manner. Meanwhile, the 8 children continue to focus their eyes on Jane and engage in a word discrimination exercise. Their interest is, apparently, quite keen.

Thus, a major purpose of the method was accomplished for Jane. That is, she demonstrated an increase in her ability to observe children while teaching and adjust herself at the moment to their responses to the teaching situation. The method, also, purposes to develop and ability to analyse

childrens' behavior and draw implications for future work with them. This would include a heightened awareness of contextual details such as spatial arrangements in the classroom or timing of a particular lesson. Both of these are usually available for modification and, so, under the teacher's control. Finally, the method should develop the teacher's awareness of her or her own potential for growth through the teaching process. These purposes are listed under TEACHER DEVELOPMENT in the METHOD ASSESSMENT FORM in the appendix.

As for the supervisor, the method allows a 'second glance' at the situation before interpreting it and making an evaluative comment to the teacher. One may gain unexpected insight into a situation with the help of the teacher and, certainly, a sense of rapport. Also, one's credibility with the teacher is apt to increase when suggestions for future work with children are based on co-analysis of evidence or 'hard data'.

In summary, the method and my preliminary findings in working with it indicate its potential for developing and strengthening reciprocal accountability: supervisor to teacher, teacher to supervisor and, finally, the accountability of both for educational experiences of value to young children.

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Appendix

VISIT RECORD FORM (abbreviated)

SUPERVISOR:
TEACHER: DATE: PLACE:

LEARNING SITUATION #1
EXCERPTS: CO-ANALYSIS

LEARNING SITUATION #2...etc.

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CONFERENCE SUMMARY

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METHOD ASSESSMENT FORM (abbreviated)

TEACHER

	DATE	DATE	DATE
1. Teacher observes children during lesson, adjusts own behavior and improves 'match' between childrens responses and lesson presentation			

METHOD ASSESSMENT FORM - con't

	DATE	DATE	DATE
2. Teacher analyses childrens behavior and draws implications for future work with them			
3. Teacher comments on aspects of teaching situation available for modification him or her			
4. Teacher refers to own learning, i.e. teacher seems to view teaching as a developmental process			

SUPERVISOR

1. Rapport is felt as strengthened by using observational record and co-analysis approach			
2. Insights gained into teacher's needs and other aspects of learning situation			
3. Information gained or needed for next visit and, or conference			